

HINTS ON RECONNAISSANCE

IN

LITTLE KNOWN COUNTRIES.

PREPARED IN THE INTELLIGENCE DIVISION OF
THE WAR OFFICE, 1890.

BY CAPT. C. E. CALLWELL, R.A., STAFF CAPTAIN.



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Colonel A. B. Steele C.B., M.V.O.,

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HINTS ON RECONNAISSANCE IN LITTLE KNOWN COUNTRIES.

1. In carrying out a reconnaissance of any kind in peace time always try to imagine that there is an army behind you awaiting your report. At a river, put the question to yourself, "How are the guns, transport, &c., to get over this?" At a port, think how you will get the men, animals, stores, &c., ashore. Look out for supplies and water, as if you had troops actually depending upon what you find.

This is the secret of practical reconnaissance work. Fix this idea in your mind, and the rest is really a matter of common sense.

2. Quality is of more importance than quantity in military reports. Be careful to distinguish between what you know to be facts and what you merely believe to be facts. If depending on what you have been told, say so. When prosecuting inquiries avoid leading questions. Ask "Where is there water?" not "Is there water at X . . . ?" Write on one side of the paper only, unless you are short of it. And print names.

3. As regards sketches generally, above all things let them be clear. Better sacrifice detail than have them confused. Print names roughly. Do not use contours unless you can manage them; they may mislead. Unless you are a practised sketcher, put in hills with vertical strokes, or else write "hills." Put in a north point. Sketches, if they have a scale, are always useful.

4. *Routes*.—Always say clearly what sort of route you are on
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—macadamized road, “araba” track, path, &c. Can wheeled guns and transport use it everywhere or anywhere? Remember that conditions vary with the season. Ground, hard when you cross it, may be a quagmire in winter. Note sandy places; they are very troublesome to wheeled transport. As to inclines, better say “steep,” “very steep,” &c. Angles are difficult to estimate, and convey little meaning to most minds. You will find measuring distance by time will give very accurate results, but remember that the pace is always slower when the sun is well up. When a track is unmistakable, small changes of direction do not matter much, but be very careful to note where other tracks turn off, and where they lead to.

There are many points to attend to in compiling route reports apart from the actual track, which are noted in the following paragraphs.

5. *Rivers*.—Reconnaissance in remote countries will ordinarily deal only with the passages of rivers.

Remember that rivers vary in volume; there is no commoner mistake than that of saying a ford is so many feet deep, because the traveller found it so when he crossed. Make inquiries, and look at the banks. Find out whether the ford is always passable, generally passable, and so on. Can wheeled conveyances cross? If approaches are bad, can they be improved? If banks are clayey, is there any wood at hand to lay down?

If the river is unfordable, look out for boats, numbers available, capacity, and so on. The size of boats is difficult to estimate without experience; better measure one or two roughly that can be taken as representative. Remember also that some sort of pier or landing stage is almost essential, and if one does not exist means of making it are desirable on the spot.

In case of bridges, their condition and capability of supporting heavy loads is of most importance. Also note width. Always look out to see if there is a ford as well, or how the river would be crossed if the bridge were broken down.

If the river is navigable, find out all about the existing boats, numbers, nature, &c. How are they moved? By sails, poling,

tracking? Could steamers or steam launches get up and down? Does the depth vary much? Can, in fact, the river be used for military transport?

6. *Seaports*.—Consider the port entirely from the point of view of disembarking and embarking troops, and what accompanies them. Can animals and guns be landed ordinarily, and how? If not, could arrangements be made with reasonable facility for landing them. What sort of boats are there, and how manned? Will they do for horses and guns? It is easy enough to sling horses or guns into boats; the difficulty is to get them out on to the shore. What is the length, &c., of the jetty, reef, beach, or whatever the landing place would be? Note communications, and whether there is open space near landing place. You will probably be able to find out all about usual conditions of sea, depth close in, nature of bottom, and so on, from mariners on the spot. It will help you greatly if you inspect a chart. Note if there are any cranes or similar appliances. Plans are useful.

7. *Transport*.—There is much to be found out about transport. If camels, horses, mules, or donkeys, note their size, amount they carry, and saddles. How are the loads packed on the saddles? Has each animal its own saddle?

In case of wheeled conveyances, give their usual pattern, how drawn and driven, size, capacity, whether adapted for heavy loads. In case of coolie transport note usual load and how carried.

What are the transport animals fed on? How often fed and watered? Amount of food? How are they fastened up? What sort of condition are they in? Are they shod? Has each animal its own head-stall and nose-bag. Do they have blankets? Who owns them as a rule? Are they in the hands of large proprietors? What is the usual price, buying and hiring? Imagine yourself to be arranging for the transport of a large force, and all these points will occur to you. Estimate the amount available as well as you can. Remember, too, that drivers are wanted. Are the usual drivers any good? Do the

owners drive, or do they hire people to do it for them? Would the drivers take service readily?

Always bear in mind that the transport may be required not for the country you are in but for some other country.

8. *Supplies and Water*.—Supplies are difficult to estimate. Note what grains are chiefly grown, and how they are stored, and where. Are there mills? What are the cattle and sheep like? Numbers and condition, price, how fed, &c.? Would fowls, eggs, milk, bread, butter, vegetables, fuel, be forthcoming. Is there any grass for the animals to eat? Is this to be found only at certain seasons?

The water question is of the utmost importance. If wells, remember to give depth below surface. Do the wells, ponds &c., always contain water? Quality must, of course, be looked to, but remember that appearances are very deceptive. Are there means of transporting water, mussucks, &c., available? Horses will drink water unsafe for men.

9. *Towns and Villages*.—Rough plans of towns and villages are very useful. Always give some sort of scale. If walled note the gates, and get the average thickness, height, and condition of walls. Look out for weak points. Note open spaces and market places. Of what material are the houses? Would they accommodate troops? Always look up the water supply carefully. Are there granaries?

10. *General*.—Observe general features of the country, whether open or intersected, if cultivated, stony, swampy, level, &c. Look out for timber; it is useful for bridging, rafts, and huts. Note peculiarities of military importance. As regards woods, state kind of tree, and whether the woods are thick or not. Look out for camping grounds, especially near towns and villages. Note the arms of the people of the country, are they generally armed? How about ammunition? Are the people friendly? Information as to tribes is useful; note when you pass from the territory of one to that of another.



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